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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 USNATO 000188

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [BO](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: RFG: NATO ENGAGEMENT WITH BELARUS AND UZBEKISTAN

REF: USNATO-EUR/RPM E-MAILS

Classified By: DCM Richard G. Olson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

1. (C) NATO's Chairman of the Military Committee (CMC) has sought political advice from the International Staff (I.S.), urging Allies to agree to invite Belarusian and Uzbekistani Chiefs of Defense (CHODs) and Foreign and Defense Ministers to upcoming CHOD and Ministerial meetings of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). NATO's Political Committee (PC) has been unable to agree to this proposed course of action. Please see USNATO recommendation in para 7; request for guidance in para 8; and background document in para 9. End Summary.

TIME TO LOOSEN THE SCREWS?

2. (C) NATO's I.S. recommended to PC Representatives on March 14 that Belarus and Uzbekistan CHODs be invited to the EAPC Military Committee meetings on May 9-10 at NATO HQ and that their Foreign Ministers be invited to the EAPC Security Forum on June 28-29 in Ohrid, Macedonia; that the Belarsian Defense Minister be invited to NATO's Defense Ministers' meeting on June 14-15 at NATO HQ, and that Uzbekistan send a "high-level MOD representative" to the Ministerial. (Uzbekistan's DefMin Mirzayev is currently banned from receiving an EU visa.)

3. (C) While NATO's treatment of the two nations is not formally linked, differing Allied views on their respective pros and cons have made each the hostage of the other, and they have been considered as a single agenda item for the last two years. NATO's practice has been to ask Belarus orally to send lower-ranking representatives than CHOD and Ministers to EAPC meetings. Uzbekistan's CHOD and Ministers have not been invited, and Uzbekistan chose not to send lower-level representatives. In 2006, the PC was unable to agree on loosening restrictions on either country, so it reached consensus to follow the previous year's precedent. In preliminary PC discussion on March 19, Allies were still deeply divided along the following lines.

ALLIED POSITIONS

4. (C) Willing to join consensus to invite Ministers and CHODs of both nations as recommended by the I.S: Greece, Italy, Spain, Netherlands (could reluctantly join consensus on both), Lithuania (Belarus cheerleader), UK (Belarus CHOD only, could reluctantly join consensus on Uzbekistan), Germany (Belarus CHOD only, Uzbekistan OK), Belgium (Belarus CHOD only, no instruction on Uzbekistan), Slovakia

(Belarus CHOD only, Uzbekistan OK), Latvia (Belarus CHOD only), Portugal (could reluctantly join consensus on Belarus CHOD and on Uzbekistan).

¶5. (C) Not willing to loosen the screws: France (no to both), Czech Republic (no to both), Denmark (no to both), Slovenia (Uzbekistan OK), Norway (no to both), Bulgaria (no to both). Other nations were silent or undecided.

U.S.: HOLDING THE LINE (FOR NOW)

¶6. (C) Faced with apparent deadlock, Acting PC Chairman Jarek Skoneieczka referred the Political Committee back to basic principles to find a way forward. He noted that since the EAPC and PfP are based on the principle of inclusiveness, consensus was required to disinvite a country or countries, or to invite them at a lower level; no consensus was required, however, to invite them to activities to which they were entitled by right of their membership. The U.S. did not accept Skoneieczka's premises without specific guidance, and proposed that the International Staff prepare a short background paper on the policy governing the participation of Partners in EAPC and PfP activities. The outcome was agreement to return the representation of Belarus and Uzbekistan in the May 2007 CHODs meeting only at its next meeting on March 26, and to address these countries' representation in the other forthcoming meetings at a later date.

RECOMMENDATION AND REQUEST FOR GUIDANCE

¶7. (C) USNATO recommends that we seek PC agreement to continue, in essence, the precedent of the last two years;

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that is, to ask Belarus and Uzbekistan not to attend the upcoming meetings at the level of CHOD and Ministers. Rationale: Belarus has not met U.S. benchmarks for any warming of relations. While some relaxation toward Uzbekistan might be in order, the "Friends of Belarus" (Lithuania in the lead) have said that they will not agree to relax restrictions on Uzbekistan without doing the same for Belarus. Procedurally, a PC decision along these lines would represent a renewed, case-by-case consensus to limit the participation of both nations. Moreover, it is probably the only way forward to which Allies can agree in the short term, before the invitations have to go out. This approach could be implemented by requesting the I.S. to put under silence a decision to ask Belarus and Uzbekistan not to attend the upcoming meetings at the level of CHOD and Ministers -- thus putting the onus of breaking silence where it belongs, on those who want to reverse the precedent.

¶8. (C) RFG: Please advise by OOB Brussels time March 26 whether to agree to inviting Belarusian and Uzbek CHODs and Ministers to the May EAPC/MC.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

¶9. (C) Following is the International Staff's March 14 recommendation, which provides further background on the arguments for relaxing restrictions on the two nations' participation. Note internal numbering of paragraphs.

NATO RESTRICTED
AC/119-N(2007)0019
POLITICAL COMMITTEE
HIGH-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT WITH BELARUS AND UZBEKISTAN
Note by the Acting Chairman

(1) The coming months will see a number of high-level meetings with Partner countries: the May 2007 EAPMC/CS CHODS meeting, the June 2007 Defence Ministers meeting and June 2007 EAPC Security Forum. The desired

level of Belarusian and Uzbek participation should be decided.

(2) Whilst both countries are treated in this document, it should be clearly noted that there is no necessary connection between them. Engagement with each requires independent consideration, on the basis of the particular circumstances.

(3) The attached note sets out the background and questions to be addressed. A letter from the Director of the International Military Staff to ASG/PASP on the question of attendance by these countries at the May 2007 CHODS meeting is also attached.

(4) I propose that we discuss these questions at the Political Committee on Monday 19 March 2007.

ANNEX 1

NATO: HIGH-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT WITH BELARUS AND UZBEKISTAN

BELARUS

The 2006 Review of NATO-Belarus relations states: NATO cooperation with Belarus is focused on low-level, practical engagement with the MOD; contact is typically at the Colonel-level and below. Belarus participates in EAPC Ministerial and CHOD meetings, but is discouraged (although no rule exists) from sending high-level officials to other EAPC/PfP events., (PO(2006)0049, para.2)

Following case-by-case decisions of the Political Committee, since its Presidential election of March 2006, Belarus has been asked to send lower-ranking representatives to EAPC Ministerial and CHOD meetings. It has been made clear to the Belarusians that they are not being excluded from the meeting in question, that they are free to attend and participate, but not at the level of Foreign/Defence Minister or CHOD.

NATO decisions have been passed to the Belarusians orally by PASP, with a copy of the meeting agenda. Putting the message in writing was counterproductive, and deemed unnecessarily provocative. Belarus sent its First Deputy Minister for Emergency Situations to the 2006 SCEPC Plenary, its resident MilRep to the November 2007 CHODS and a State Secretary to the EAPC Defence Ministerial.

The Political Committee discussed Belarus on 26th February

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(AC/119-DS(2007)0011). Participants noted that whilst the present situation could perhaps offer new opportunities for engagement, it was premature to determine the sincerity of recent signals sent by the regime to the West.

The attached letter from the Director of the International Military Staff states that continued exclusion of the Belarusian CHOD has a negative impact on mil-mil cooperation and that engagement offers NATO the chance to exercise positive influence. He is correct that during the review of NATO-Belarus relations, Nations made clear that they did not see the Belarusian military as involved in political repression; it was this consideration which formed the basis for our continued practical cooperation with the MoD.

The approach followed during 2006 was a clear signal by Allies of their objections to the course followed by the Belarusian regime. Nations are requested to consider how they wish to continue; given the nature of the Belarusian administration such restrictions could become permanent or semi-permanent.

BELARUS - RECOMMENDATION

In light of the above, it is recommended that the Belarusian CHOD be invited to participate in EAPC/MC meetings at CHOD level, subject to there continuing to be no indications of military involvement in repression.

It is also recommended that we resume invitations to the Belarusian Defence and Foreign Ministers to attend the respective Ministerial meetings. The Belarusian CHOD, Defence and Foreign Ministers are not on the EU,s visa ban list.

A Belarusian request for technical discussions by the President of the National Academy of Sciences at NATO HQ would not normally need to be considered by the Political Committee. However, as Mikhail V. Myasnikovich was Head of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus from 1995 to 2001, it was judged appropriate that the PC also be asked for its view of such a meeting.

UZBEKISTAN

During 2006, it was also agreed that Senior level (Minister and CHOD) would not be invited to high level meetings. Of course, following reactions to Andijan, Uzbekistan followed an empty-chair policy,, with the result that, regardless of the invitee, Uzbekistan was not represented. However, last December the Uzbek Government resumed attendance at EAPC meetings and events.

Although the domestic situation in Uzbekistan has not changed significantly since last year, the Government has made some positive efforts to improve relations with the EU and NATO. While the seriousness of the Uzbek intentions of re-engagement will have to be tested further in the coming months, restricting Uzbek participation in high level EAPC events could trigger a negative reaction on their side and lead to renewal of their empty chair policy, vis--vis NATO/EAPC.

Nations must be aware, however, that DM Mirzayev is currently on the EU visa ban list (he was President Karimov,s security policy advisor during the Andijan tragedy) and therefore, as it currently stands, would not be able to attend the EAPC/DM.

UZBEKISTAN - RECOMMENDATION

Against this background, it is suggested that invitations for the May 2007 EAPMC/CS CHODS meeting and June 2007 EAPC Security Forum be extended to the Uzbek CHOD and Foreign Minister, respectively. As to the June 2007 Defence Ministers meeting, Allies may consider inviting "a high level MOD representative," on the understanding that this question might be revisited pending the outcome of the next EU review of the sanctions against Uzbekistan in May 2007.

End Text.
NULAND